

GENIUS OF FRIENDSHIP

*'T. E. LAWRENCE'*



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## GENIUS OF FRIENDSHIP

'T. E. LAWRENCE'



I n the summer of 1929, when 338171 Aircraftman T. E. Shaw, R.A.F., was generally known to be at Cattewater, Plymouth, a certain woman living in South Devon desired greatly to have 'Lawrence of Arabia' sit at her table. 'Do persuade him to come' she begged of a mutual acquaintance. Shaw was translating Homer—'sweating every spare hour I get over old Odysseus, a new version of whose adventures I am producing (on a cash basis) for a very rich American. Hope he likes it better than I do—but the cash will be superb when it is all over.' At that time meeting new faces was for him worse than riding at night into the glare of headlamps, then never dropped for courtesy's sake. Even his friends would not let 'Lawrence of Arabia' alone; so he could seldom lose that Frankenstein consciousness. Being extremely sensitive and kindly, he was always being with his friends what they expected him to be, reflecting their interest in 'Lawrence of Arabia'. He was thereby much self-entangled. On this particular occasion the acquaintance was persuasive. 'They're awfully nice people, I'm sure you'll like them.' At last

Shaw agreed to go, and to a dinner party. 'I don't think I ever want to meet a famous man again,' declared the hostess afterwards. 'He never once looked at me, or at any other guest. He refused to shake hands. I felt a perfect fool. He said nothing. He refused to eat. "Hors d'oeuvre?" "No thank you." "Soup?" "No thank you." "Sherry?" "No thank you." "Some water?" "No thank you." "Fish?" "No thank you." "But surely you're going to eat grouse?" "May I just have a little fried potato, please?" "But you *must* have some of this delicious bird, Mr. Shaw." "Really, no thank you." "But don't you ever eat normal food?" "Frequently." "What do you like, as a rule?"' Shaw began to feel it was funny. He told the truth. '“Tea and wads.” “Whatever are wads, Mr. Shaw?” He explained, sitting motionless in chair, hands folded inertly on lap. “I am sorry we haven't a canteen here, Mr. Shaw, since so obviously you seem to prefer your own food.” His face got heavier and more stupid, and I was very glad when he got up and went.’ The story as the good woman tells it is of course a self-criticism; which one day she may perceive.

A few years earlier 'T. E. Lawrence' would perhaps have remained less silent or monosyllabic. One of his friends tells how, at another party, a somewhat pretentious lady was telling anecdotes, most of them about titled people to whom she re-

ferred by nick-names and pet-names. Seeing that her listener was not interested, she leaned forward and said, 'I fear my conversation does not interest Colonel Lawrence very much?' Lawrence bowed from the hips, and murmured impassively, 'It does not interest him at all.' He intended the reply as a joke, a sort of truthful joke—while realizing it couldn't possibly come off as a joke in that atmosphere. In those days, soon after the Armistice, his power had no direction, and was used directly, personally, often scornfully; he was quicksilver; later he became impersonal, shutting off his power with uneasy people, conserving his energy, becoming inert. Later still, when he ceased to strain and had found his poise in the ranks of the R.A.F., he grew less self-insubstantial, and easily sure of himself. No longer did he have, as it were, to unscrew his eyes to look at anyone in conversation; he no longer used the retina's sensitivity to discern his companion, as he gazed downwards with unfocussed sight. He held his head up, and one felt his sure impersonal strength, constructively critical, clear, understanding every intricacy of human impulse; because he understood the intricacies of himself. 'I am a chameleon,' he once said to me. Every child is a chameleon, in that sense, taking colour from its surroundings, absorbing ideas, sayings, attitudes, from its elders. So are all young mammals, birds, and even fish. Only those who have not

needed to strive to maintain their life or integrity remain static. Absence of sensitivity is stupidity. Those fast in a tradition which is merely unrealized habit, among men; sheep, bullocks, among the lower mammals.

When first I knew 'T. E. Lawrence' he was in the second stage of his post-war self. He had found his poise, but was not always sure of himself with others. I was excited at the thought of meeting him; for I knew, instantly, after reading the opening paragraph of *Revolt in the Desert*, serialized in *The Daily Telegraph* in the early spring of 1924, that we had similarities of sight and ear. His letters to me, beginning with a long criticism of *Tarka* from Karachi in 1928, had confirmed my earlier belief. He was coming across Dartmoor from Plymouth to the cottage where I lived in the village of Ham, near the coast of north-west Devon. Knowing that he did not smoke, I had hidden my pipe and tobacco jar; not because he might disapprove, but because I was always wanting to give up smoking, knowing that it was poison for my nature and temperament. I was glad to be able, with authority, to ask my wife to give my pipes and tobacco jar to the next tramp who might come along.

For lunch Loetitia had prepared a salad of lettuce, tomato, onions, nuts, apples, and other fruit, with cheese, plums, figs, cream, cake, and chocolate. I had read in Robert Graves' book that T. E.

disliked set meals, and was happiest wandering about a room, taking an apple, and in short, pleasing himself. 'And quite right, too,' said Loetitia. 'I think everyone should do just what they want to do.' So apples were put on the shelf, the solitary book-case, the window ledges, and even in the wash-house. Our small son Windles, then three and a half years old, went round with us, approving this unusual distribution of apples.

The long letter from India, sent to Edward Garnett first, had been a surprise: though I had known, without exactly formulating the thought, that one day such a thing would happen. One morning, early in 1928, as I had been in bed watching the rain blurring the one small window of the bedroom, and feeling there was nothing worth getting up for, my wife brought with the tea a large registered letter. On the envelope was Edward Garnett's handwriting. Inside were two foolscap sheets lined with a minute and meticulous hand, smaller than ordinary typewriting. The writing was extremely neat, and the body of the letter was filled with numbers referring to the pages and lines of—good heavens, *Tarka the Otter*! I turned to the end of page four—there must have been a thousand words or more on each page—and saw the signature, slurred a little as though (I thought) the writer were always in slight dread of the spirit of autograph hunting, and all it implied in life. 'It's

from Lawrence of Arabia,' I said to Loetitia. 'I knew it would happen! When I read the first paragraph of his *Revolt in the Desert* I knew we were alike, mentally, and one day we should be friends.' I felt firmer within myself, more self-strong; for generally I was without self-assurance, owing to loneliness and the need constantly to hold to my ideas in a community which did not accept those ideas or beliefs. No work was done that day in the little writing room built of 'wrecking' wood, mud-mortar, and small shale stones—annex to the cottage built half a century before by the only village murderer known to local history. (The village constable nagged the old cobbler so persistently that one day, suddenly, he struck at the constable's head with a reaping hook: and died in prison, the night before he was due to be hanged.) Instead I looked at my printed books as though with new eyes, and in a renewed zest posted off my only copy of *The Old Stag* to 338171 A/c T. E. Shaw, R.A.F., Karachi, with marginal notes of how this and that idea and detail had been gleaned or grafted; how this sentence, like some of his own, had the Con-radian aural rhythm reinforced by a sharper, modern freedom of sight; and that my work was Snowdon to his Everest. His reply again confirmed what I dared scarcely to hope in the instant of glancing at the opening paragraph of *Revolt in the Desert*: that the friendship or companionship I had

always been seeking in life, so far in vain, was possible. That friendship would not be based on the charitable compromises of give-and-take which everyone declared to be the only foundation; it would not be built on tolerance of dissimilarity: but on the clarity of equal thought and sight. 'T. E. Lawrence' was abnormal only because he thought quickly and surely, because he was a man who could see plain every effect arising from a cause—as the sun saw both cause and effect, without shadow or obscurity.

A short while afterwards, it seemed, a reply came from a fort in Waziristan.

¶ 'Now a confession. In the R.A.F. we live in a communism which is voluntary and real. So soon as the old stag arrived he disappeared. I haven't an idea who has him, out of the seven hundred fellows of us in camp. He will infallibly return, after a few days, or after many days; nothing ever goes wholly astray, nor is anything wasted. They are like townees on a desert island, longing to taste all the book fruit they see on the shelves of all the shops, but afraid to taste, without some guide to tell them what's what.'

'Ah ha! Come here, Loetitia! Doesn't matter about the milk boiling over, take it off, then it won't. Listen. Do you remember where he criticized the phrase, in the chapter where Tarka was in the fen by Taw Head on Dartmoor, *Songlight*

*came silent*, with the remark that it “tripped him up on his face in the bog”? Songlight for dawn, coined by Francis Thompson, is a lovely word, so I used it there. Well, look, here he talks about *shelves of all the shops* on a desert island! Don’t you see?’

‘Yes, dear. Only I don’t quite know what it’s all about. Oh bother, I can smell the milk—’

‘Oh damn the milk. I—er—oh, sorry I disturbed you. But should the baby have milk so hot? Aren’t the good bacteria killed by boiling?’

‘It’s milk for you, actually.’

‘I really don’t want it.’

‘Bother. You asked me specially to warm it for you.’

‘Warm it, yes, but not *boil* it. Boiled milk loses all its nourishment. Never boil milk. Sixty degrees centigrade—’

Loetitia retired hurt, once again, that in my selfishness I never appeared to appreciate her selfless labour; I retired irritated, once again, that she never appeared to appreciate the impersonal things of the mind. Her favourite reading was in *The Happy Magazine*, *Punch*, and *The Humorist*; the books she was urged to read, from the little writing room shelves, she read dutifully; and did not discuss them. At times I was remorseful for forcing so much on her; I knew I interrupted her happy rhythm of housework, shopping, and working for

husband and child. Loetitia was always being called to listen to this poem by Blake or Shelley; to hear on the wireless this music by Delius or Wagner or César Franck, at any hour of the day or night—so different from the easy, careless life she had known with her brothers, before a friendless war-haunted young man had stirred her pity and protectiveness.

¶ ‘Being almost book-blind, themselves, any guide is welcome. So they assume that all my books are eatable. I suffer, once in a way, as now; but generally I’m delighted that they should find me of use. I like these fellows enormously. We are really the same kind of creature or would have been if I’d had a natural life, and not a mort of extravagant experience—and the nearer I can creep back towards them, the safer I feel. They give one a root in the ground. . . .

¶ ‘The Arab business was a freak in my living; and if I did the wonders they ascribe to me, then, it was wholly by accident, for in normal times I’m plumb ordinary. I don’t believe the yarns they tell. Only it seems conceited to refuse to accept public opinion about oneself.’

I knew, ah yes, I knew, how he must have suffered, lost energy, by being with the people whose minds were made up of ‘public opinion’. That ghastly, white-sepulchral public opinion! Death to the artist, if one could not escape. I knew what he had been through: for in those days, of the decade

after the Armistice, it was always a struggle to be oneself; relations and acquaintances had almost persuaded one into believing that one was wrong, warped, morbid, neurotic, etc. 'Your so-called writing is merely an excuse for being idle' my father had declared, and forbidden me to enter his house ever again. (It was later that I developed sympathy for my father, who, himself a sensitive, had been exhausted by the frustration inherent in his life: also he had been badly shaken by a bomb-explosion in the last year of the Great War.) The nicest old gentleman I knew was my father-in-law; but even we had little in common. 'Humph, my son-in-law's an ass' he had said, on finishing the last page of *The Pathway*. And that, indeed, was the only comment ever heard from any of my immediate circle, on the various books I had written. So most of the conversation between us was either stammered, halting, or delivered as a monologue of explosive intensity.

In other words, I had yet to 'find' myself among others and so to create the effect I desired.

An ex-Master of Otter Hounds had sent me a letter beginning, 'I write to warn you that your projected book on the life of an otter is not only unnecessary, since the field has been adequately covered already, and the day of the pretentious amateur in sport has gone.' This sportsman added, 'I won't blister your ears by telling you what cer-

tain members of the Crowhurst pack said on reading something purporting to be about an otter in a magazine by you.' (I wrote and thanked him for what was in effect a helpful criticism of minor points, and received in reply a long and conciliatory letter full of good facts, including an account of an otter drowning a hound in Ireland, after a day-long hunt, which gave me a lovely climax.)

In those days, living in a remote part of England, on a few shillings a week, in a labourer's cottage, bearded, and writing books which no one read, emphasized solitariness to oneself: and on the rare occasions when I found myself in other people's houses I often heard myself suddenly inventing, from sheer nervousness, in order to end a period of uneasiness, statements of a startling nature. Those sudden spurts of invention were what are called lies. They were made always a year or two ahead of their materialization. One was that Galsworthy had written to me about my books; then it was Hardy; then Arnold Bennett had asked me to dine with him; then Lawrence of Arabia had written to me; then I had won the Hawthornden Prize. Some of the shots went wide, and may be still (I hope not) hanging over my life in space—such as having fallen off Bideford Bridge, then being widened, at midnight on my racing motor-cycle, which had vanished in sand.

¶ Had I known you were so established a writer

I'd never have had the cheek to write down my 'prentice ideas about the book. By the care and passion of the text I'd assumed you were a beginner, half in love with his first effort, and probably now heart-broken at its failure to come anywhere near the perfection dreamed of:—I'll never forget the despair with which I read my *Seven Pillars* in 1923, after forgetting it for two years. It was incredibly unlike what I'd thought my talents (of which I'd had too good an opinion) would bring forth, that I then and there swore I'd never try again. If there'd been any redeemable feature . . . but the whole thing was unwholesome.

¶ Back to Tarka: the worst thing about the war-generation of introspects is that they can't keep off their blooming selves. As you saw, I'm glad to say, by the length and elaboration of my remarks, the book did move me, and gratify me, profoundly. It was the real stuff. I shouldn't, if I were you, attempt to re-do it; the non-successes, the gritty stuff, of real people, are altogether topping as examples of how things come and grow; it's like sculpture: the brokenness of the *Venus de Milo* is the main virtue of that sentimental but very lovely work. I like best of all the books in which fallible men have burst themselves trying to be better than they can be. Tarka, to anyone who's tried to write, is a technical delight, all the more perfect for being imperfect, here and there. If you write it out again,

and make a rounded and gracious thing of it, you'll rob us of the object lesson, and deprive us of what might have been a new and very lovely book, on another subject.

¶ 'I wonder what you'll do about money. Tarka will not have made much, and the more carefully you write the less you are likely to earn. Do you notice how the writers who are very widely sold are so often careless writers? Dickens, I'm thinking of, and Tolstoi, and Balzac: though Balzac rewrote all his novels in proof, but he wasn't thinking about their form, so much as of the forms of the characters in them. I wish I could think clearly enough about all the writers of the world, and see if it's more than blind chance which makes one seem good and another bad: if only there was an absolute somewhere: the final standard by which everything could be measured. At present we have ever so many surveys of literature: but they aren't so much surveys as sentimental journeys across it. For a survey you must have a measured base: and instead of that we have just opinions and opinions.

¶ ' . . . You say the *Pathway* is unhappy stuff. Well, so is all my writing. Let not us impotents be shy of our impotencies, behind the licked envelopes of letters.'

Shortly after this, the Hawthornden Prize was given to *Tarka*, and life for me began to change. Even so, the truth as I saw and tried to utter it



seemed as exceptionable as all my previous statements, fictitious or otherwise. People seemed to live in all sorts of shells, coverings, and crannies: away from the plain open sky. Or was the pretension or warp in myself?

Meanwhile the publishers of *Tarka* had asked me to send a travel book by a young American writer named Eldon Rutter to T. E. Shaw.

¶ 'Thank you for Rutter's books on Mecca and Medina [wrote T. E.]. They are most modestly good: very human, and fair, and fresh. The entire absence of great-mindedness is very charming. I wonder who he is? Some very queer fish, probably, who has lived for a long while on the wrong side of the world.

¶ 'You'll laugh to hear that I still pick up *Tarka* often, read a few pages, and lay it down. I find it holds more than I thought, even at first: and what I said the first time was "pemmican": a variety, I'm told, of pressed beef.

¶ 'The public pressure on you to write another book before you feel inclined to think of a pen seriously, must be horrid.'

It was now more than a year since T. E. had first written. I did not send him any further books, not wanting to give him possible embarrassment, should he think them poor, and not like to say so. He wrote several letters: and after being moved to Miransha, was being sent home to England again.

'I am a creature of habit, and to change station upsets my mind,' he had written from that small fort in Waziristan. His 'news-value' had nearly driven him homeless again; the evil 'news-value', which is parasitic on all so-called fame or achievement, had, years before, 'splashed' the 'sensational' fact one morning that Colonel T. E. Lawrence was hiding in the Royal Air Force as an aircraftman. One of his sergeants, recognizing him, had sold the 'story' to the paper for fifty pounds. So Shaw had been turned out of the R.A.F. He re-enlisted in the Tank Corps. After two years he had been permitted to return to the Air Force, but on condition that his term of service would be terminated instantly 'should that sort of thing happen again'. (Certain senior R.A.F. officers should have educated themselves more fittingly to understand the world, and in particular the world based upon the manufactured lies of newspapers, all produced to make money; they should have realized that T. E. Shaw was not responsible for the great bites that the rapacious vultures of the lower middle-class press took out of the remnants of the private life of this noble Englishman.) And then 'that sort of thing' had happened again, while Shaw was in India, sent there to be out of the way of publicity. A Sunday newspaper, on the flimsiest hearsay—a mere whiff to the vulture—had splashed a story, the sort of sensa-

tional news that is created in the news-editor's office, about 'Colonel Lawrence's mystery presence' on the North-West Frontier. What was he doing there? Why did he disappear into the bazaars, and make journeys into the desert? It so happened that I was in that newspaper office two days before that story was published with a letter from T. E. Shaw in my pocket: had I known what was being prepared, I would have done my best to spike the story, for Edward Garnett had told me that Shaw was always dreading, indeed he had a neurosis about, publicity. The story appeared, with what are called 'repercussions' in the foreign press, particularly in Afghanistan, between which country and the India office relations at that time were 'delicate'; and Shaw was brought home.

¶ 'They have posted me to Plymouth: so if ever the frost breaks (Brrrr . . . Ughhhh) a motor-bike will disturb Skirr Cottage. A horrible bike: but so beautiful in its owner's eyes and heart!

¶ 'It will be comic, our meeting: I am icy cold, and very English, and correct. Sober as judges used to be. However, all the more reason for meeting a wild man. At least your reputation won't scare me off. A bas all the Hawthorndens. Hawthorn, forsooth! Den, forsooth!

¶ 'It will not be for a while. A new camp takes learning: especially for me, who am always uneasy with a new crowd.'

It was February, 1929. (He was spending a few days' leave in London at the house in Westminster where he had written part of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, soon after the war, when sometimes he had worked all night, living in an attic room lent by a friend and prowling about the streets of London at all hours, burning away present life for the recreation of scenes and turmoils in the mental glare of ancient Arabian sunlight. Taking fertility out of himself, and putting nothing back, to adapt a farming metaphor. It was not so much the physical action during the war that exhausted him, but the several intensive writings and re-writings of his book: the prolonged unnatural excitement and insufficient food. For while after the physical action in Arabia his life was empty, after the imaginative action his mind was empty—nothing to do, nothing to hope for. Except to be left alone, forgotten, his ambition to be doing happy-easy things every day, eating and sleeping, the squirrel cage of the brain at rest.)

¶ 'I am waiting for long evenings and warmer days, to come and see you. Life is very long, and I like to stick very close to a new camp, at first, learning it.'

It was April. I had not written to him meanwhile, lest a letter seem to be implying demands on him.

May passed, and midsummer day in June, the

days growing shorter, the hay cut in my hilltop field; and then a letter in the familiar black Indian ink. Being reluctant to read it, I asked Loetitia to open the envelope, which she did carefully, with a knitting needle.

¶ 'Any chance of your being at Skirr Cottage on Sunday next, June 30th? Apparently I am to be free all that day (free days are like rubies to me, now) and if it happened to be fine I might dash across, arriving before or about noon, and leaving after noon.'

July the First, anniversary of the opening battle of the Somme ('A Real British Victory at Last', had cried the London papers. 60,000 British casualties and nearly all the rest back in the old front line before midday, says history) and on July 2 a letter.

¶ 'If it rained at your end as it did here, all yesterday, then this letter isn't needed to explain my defection. Only if the sun shone brilliantly, and your hay is made, I must apologise. It was quite impossible for pleasure riding. I can ride (at 30) on a wet road: but that's transport, not sport. Riding gets pleasant in the 40-50 range.

Yours,

T. E. S.

¶ 'Not next week, I think, nor the next. They should give one another try when the chosen Sunday is dud.

T. E. S.'

I wrote and asked him if he would be going to the R.A.F. display at Hendon, saying also that I was going, during the same visit to London, to the award of the Hawthornden Prize for that year. It was to be given to Siegfried Sassoon for his *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*. I offered to take T. E. to the R.A.F. show in my car, a new small cheap popular model I had bought with part of the flush of recent money. He replied that it would not be fast enough to get him there and back.

¶ 'Noon Sat. to midnight Sunday is so short a week-end, but it is all we get, without special permission, and the seeking that sticks in my throat . . . if you see Sassoon to speak to, tell him that his book (novel) pleased me: but I'd lose it all for his worst poem.

¶ ' "All Quiet" is the screaming of a feeble man. It will not last as long as Tarka, except as a document. Do not distress yourself about "lasting": not even our bones do that, except momentarily. I think that to last is only to be in doubt longer.'

A postscript said he would try and reach the village on July 28, if I would be there.

In the evening of 27 July the dulcet tones of the B.B.C. foretold a deep depression approaching Ireland and our South-West Coast from the Atlantic. Towards midnight the rain began to drive against the southern window of the writing room, and I went to bed saying to myself that he would not

come. In the morning it was still raining, and I thought of the eighty-mile journey from Plymouth, across Dartmoor in a mist of driving rain, and the narrow twisting roads and lanes, many of them untarred, grey slippery surfaces. Nevertheless the tobacco jar was put in the cupboard, the salad made, and apples prominently placed, as I have already told. It rained and it rained ('like aught out of a sieve' as the farmer opposite declared), and I sat in the little built-on room, re-writing some of *The Village Book* scenes while a branch of the apple tree outside knocked a bunch of hard green apples on the sheet-iron roof. The clock in the church tower a gunshot away (sometimes in boredom I used to fire at the weathercock, just out of damage range) struck twelve times. I got up and looked out of the window and with a start saw a red face under a peaked blue uniform cap, intensely blue eyes, short body enclosed in glistening black, astride a large nickel-plated motorcycle slowing in the lane outside. As the bike stopped a rubber foot was put on the ground and the cap peak pushed up slightly. After a swift mutual grin I opened the garden door and ran down the steps. He pulled the bike on its stand.

'Hullo.'

'Hullo. I had to come. I found myself developing a complex about it.'

'So was I. Will you put the bike in the shed?'

'No, thanks. I must leave at half-past one.'

'You shall. That's a fine storm suit.'

'It was designed for mine-sweeping during the war—no longer made.'

He padded into the cottage. His eyes and head moved with noticeable quickness. He was instantly alert to what I said, he reacted to my every movement. He knew what I was going to say before I said it. His reflexes were extraordinarily quick and sensitive: quicksilver. He did not appear to be a man; he was more like a boy, but without a boy's lack of freedom. Was he tall, was he short? It was not noticeable. This was not due to having lost my head; rather, I had found my head—firm on my shoulders. But at the time I did not have these thoughts or rather reflections; I formulated them later. All I felt at the moment was that, for the first time in my life, I was becoming real and strong. Usually I was an eye-averting, stammering, exaggerating eccentric; now I was my true, firm self.

Does all this seem too analytical, too highbrow-introspective? It was as though I had cast my slough on him, and emerged a fine, cool, poised fellow. For this brassy-headed youth seemed to have assumed my other self: that self's too-soft voice, shyness, hypersensibility. Led through the dark and damp and rotting rhomboid called the larder (the cottage was under the side of a hill, without damp-courses in the walls, and was chill

and gloomy even at midsummer), and through the whitewashed prison-cell-like kitchen, he bobbed and bowed and nodded to Gwennie Gammon our sixteen-year-old maid, daughter of Tom Gammon the mason with whom I had poached many a rabbit in the old days. Gwennie with a shy grin half got up, murmuring 'How d'you do', and the figure encased in glistening black rubber murmured 'How d'you do' for the second time, and after several quick glances of blue eyes and indecisive turns of yellow-haired head the black figure padded swiftly, glidingly, into the cavernous wash-house, hung with spider webs on peeling damp walls, and accepted help, with many thanks, in the pulling off of the minesweeping suit. Then I worked the handle of the suction pump, and asked him if he would like to wash. 'No, thanks. Yes, I will. Thanks. Your own well?' 'Yes.' He washed rapidly. 'Towel behind the door.' He set it smooth on the rail after use. On heavy boots he clattered in swiftly, and after trying to wipe those boots (they were dry and polished as though for kit-inspection) on the wire mat, moved into the dim sitting-room. Windles, the three-and-a-half-year old, came to look at him, holding spade in one hand and bucket in the other. In the bucket were apples the child had laboriously collected from wash-house, bookshelf, and window ledge. I did not need to explain the joke to the visitor, for he

had perceived it in the time of the turn of my glance from the little boy's face to his own. So no words were used, only smiles and nods, and a delicate touch, as in blessing, on the little boy's head. Loetitia came into the room, rich colour in her cheeks as usual when people came to the house. She was not shy, it was just her nature; simple, never critical, always natural. We spoke together for a few minutes in a flow of happiness while the visitor told us that he had left Plymouth shortly before nine, the journey taking three hours, raining all the time. I asked if he would like to see the writing-room, and led the way upstairs, and through the bedroom and by the minute verandah to the annex built by the poor murderer.

This had one arm-chair, a William Morris type bought second-hand after use in an officers' mess during the war. He recognized its origin instantly, taking the thought from behind my eyes. He sat still in the chair, hands in lap, only the muscles of his eyes and mouth moving for the next three-quarters of an hour. I sat on the log-box, crudely made of American oak, my first grown-up attempt at carpentry, and we talked. Only once during that time did our eyes meet; his unscrewing themselves, as it were, in a struggle of reluctance against determination to meet my freer, offered glance. Otherwise I did not look at him at all, being fully aware of him with my entire body.

If this account seem meticulous and over-elaborated, it is because of a desire to recreate the past, to make it live again as fully as the limitation of words allows. I recall part of our conversation. 'Have you had any Americans calling yet to see the greatest living descriptive prose writer in English?' This was slightly shocking; I didn't know what to make of it, except to be amiably reticent, non-committal. 'You will. And to the first fifty or so you'll look very modest and droopingly acquiescent, and you'll murmur a mixture of thanks and self-deprecation: and to the fifty-first you'll probably say "Balls". That's the only way to keep a sense of self-criticism. If you don't, you'll become like Bernard Shaw, believing only the nice things said about you: and then you'll have to imitate yourself in order to do anything at all: and the critics will say you're a classic.'

*H. W.* 'When you said in your letter that Remarque's "All Quiet" was the "screaming of a feeble man", I immediately thought "That's Williamson, too." I liked the book very much until half-way, when it seemed to me that the author had never been in a battle. The battle scenes seem to be descriptions from seeing a war-film; also they have the tension of imagined dread, of non-experience.'

*T. E.* 'I liked it, too, the first fifty pages. But it loses because of its abandoned subjectivity. It's

post-war nostalgia shoved into the war period. Ye-es, it has the tension of imagined dread. He was too young to know how to write objectively. The Germans suffered more than we did. Especially their youth in 1918, ill-fed, fathers and brothers dead. There'll come a strong reaction against the spirit of "All Quiet" very soon now, I suppose. They're due for a strong man of a new, modern, quick type.'

*H. W.* 'Perhaps the only really strong men are the weak men, self-built from complete awareness of themselves.'

*T. E.* 'Strong men certainly are rare.'

I could not help it; I began to laugh. He began to laugh, too, a sort of reserved laughter. Were we thinking the same thought, how we were both 'doing our stuff'? Outside it rained steadily. The Brough-Superior motor-cycle, nickel-plated, gleamed below the window.

*H. W.* 'I used to have a motor-bike—a Norton—belt-driven, no gears, long and light, less than a hundredweight—it would do seventy, dangerously, liable to speed-wobble. Open exhaust, loud noise, swank. The roads were bad in those days, red dust in summer, red mud in winter. It used to stand beside my bed, that old cottage over there, below the church, owls in the roof. Yours must be frightfully fast.'

*T. E.* 'I broke the speedometer once: it clicked,

then it rattled, then shrieked itself to death. About a hundred and three, I think. Between Salisbury and Winchester. The bike rock-steady. I love it!

*H. W.* 'One day, soon after the Armistice, when at the Rest Camp on the Folkestone Lees, I and the Officers' Mess Sergeant, who rode a Douglas, composed a fake telegram to the Press Association in London about a race just after dawn on the Ashford-Folkestone road. I was the winner at 77 m.p.h., he was the second at 65, and a mythical S. Mercier third. They printed it on the front page. I was authentically thrilled. I used to invent all sorts of things like that, too much imagination in riot. I console myself by thinking Shelley used to do the same sort of thing—many other famous men, too, I suspect.'

*T. E.* (laughing, revealing many gold fillings in teeth—dental decay being a sign of past physical exhaustion—and giving quick glance, as though it had occurred to him that *H. W.* might have in mind the origin of his own legendary visit to Damascus in 1917): 'If one knows, and admits, the truth about oneself, every man will find his own portrait, or experience, in the revelation. The danger is not knowing where to stop.' (A light frown, and the current diverted.) 'I think a writer should make readers rather than find them through self-identification. Objective writing lasts, for it's readable all the time and in any age.'

Conversation thereafter was so easy and stimulating that nothing of it remained in my mind; no hangover. I was living fully.

At one o'clock I asked him if he would like to eat. A plan to approach the question of food had been made, something like this. 'The tomatoes and lettuces are my own growing, on a foundation of sand and seaweed, and I can recommend the Atlantic flavour.' What I actually said was, 'Let's come and eat—your sort of food is our sort, too.'

It was a happy meal. The little boy, after taking his fill, went and stood near the guest; the two had made natural contact, but the guest had spoken no word to the child. The guest had no pose, no attitude, no reserve; he was alert and smiling, always gently laughing; one knew he was all through as he was on the surface. The effect was shiningness, a radiation. He was natural; he thought with his whole being. Could he be over forty years of age? When he had gone—and somehow he was gone, and a blank feeling been left in his place—I asked Loetitia how old she thought he was. 'Goodness, I don't know! He was no age at all.' 'Did you like him?' 'Very much.' 'Would you say he was charming?' 'Charming? No, that's not the word. Gracious? No, that's not the word either. I can't explain what I feel.' Nor could I. He was laughter, pure, sweet laughter.

On August 23, of that year, 1929, he wrote he

was working on the Schneider Trophy Committee. We were preparing to leave the little old dark cottage and go to a thatched house in a valley just off the moor by a ford in a trout stream. Shallowford was the name of the place, with a garden full of old cottage flowers; sweet-william, phlox, stock, wall-flower, poppy, marigold, and Michaelmas daisy. Thither migration was made in October; Loetitia, Windles, the new baby, the old spaniel, and the egocentric author.

¶ 'It was very pleasant to see you, and Mrs. Williamson: and the kid! I'm always a bit sorry for children. We've had a hell of a bad time: so'll they, I suppose. Among my 1001 leave plans is a night or two with you in the new place: don't be alarmed. I can sleep on the doorstep, and your food is luxury itself, after the R.A.F. In 48 hours we could tear to pieces all contemporary books, and begin English literature with a new clean sheet!

¶ 'In this camp one is always on duty: and I want to be able to look at and listen to trees and running water, at my leisure, with no whistles or parades to keep on interrupting.'

In the new valley rain fell every day for three months and there was nothing to do except walk alone by the swollen river or sit indoors in the writing-room staring at trees on the hill-side swaying in the gales. Loetitia sat in the day nursery downstairs, happily sewing, reading one or another

of the English magazines with their stories unrelated to life, with their dwindling circulations. During the past year several books had got themselves written somehow. In a fortnight *Dandelion Days*, an autobiographically-based novel of school life just before the war, had been completely rewritten, working night and day. (I remember telling Edward Garnett this, and his reply in a Soho restaurant at a table where many writers were sitting, 'In a fortnight? It can't be any good, then.')

It did not occur to me, as a mere biological fact, until later, that my world was futility and hopelessness because I was nervously exhausted. Another book had been hackwork, every word penned reluctantly, and with curses that it had been undertaken. An Australian soldier had asked me to write some words under a series of lino-cuts; and I had volunteered to write an entire book around them. It had been tedious work, forcing one bare word after another. *The Patriot's Progress* would have been published a year before the war books' boom, but for indolence and the appearance of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. For when my hackwork was half done, I had read an advance copy of *All Quiet*, given me by the English publisher, who prophesied it would 'sweep the world'. This same publisher had urged me to cut certain passages in *Tarka*, declaring that by their retention a good selling animal book was being spoiled. He had blue-pen-



cilled the winter chapter, saying it didn't come off; later, 'T. E. Lawrence' had said it was the climax of the book, containing passages which he ranked with the 'orient wheat' passage of Traherne. Sitting in the garden that summer before, I had read half of *All Quiet*; and no more. It was wrong; true in spirit, but false in the letter. Its derived emotionalism would be accepted as the 'real thing at last'. Obviously it was diluted Barbusse. *Le Feu*, *Goodbye to all that*, *Sergeant Grischa*, *The Enormous Room*, *Revolt in the Desert*—these were recreations of the past; *All Quiet* was an exhalation of old battlefields, not a re-creation of them. I doubted if the author had been through a battle: and this stuff would 'sweep the world'. I felt baffled every time I tried to continue *The Patriot's Progress*, which was abandoned for over a year.

When three hundred thousand copies of *All Quiet* had been sold in Great Britain; when the war-boom was becoming the slump, when book-sellers were looking ruefully at the scores of unsold stuff on their shelves, *The Patriot's Progress* was published. It had a queer reception, five thousand copies being subscribed some weeks before publication; and it sold, eventually, five thousand and one copies. The odd copy must have been bought by 'T. E. Lawrence', for another critical letter arrived, having the effect of sunshine in the dull valley life.

¶ 'I have been too long, perhaps, over the Patriot's Progress: but after my first reading of it everybody in the Hut got hold of it, and I only saw it again yesterday, when I read it for the second time.

¶ 'It is all right: that is the first thing to say. To do a war-book is very hard now, after all that has been written, but yours survives as a thing of its own. I heaved a great sigh of relief when it was safely over. I like it all.

¶ 'Your writing scope grows on me. This book is a tapestry, a decoration: the almost-null John Bull set against a marvellous background. It is the most completely two-dimensional thing possible—and on the other hand you give us your cycle of novels (about yourself, I dare say) which are as completely three-dimensional, full of characters as a Christmas Pudding of almonds, with the background only occasional, and only occasionally significant. I am convinced, by both Tarka and the P.P. that you have many other books to write before you repeat yourself and become a classic.

¶ 'I sandwiched the P.P. between readings of "Her Privates We". The P.P. is natural man, making no great eyes at his sudden crisis: whereas "Her Privates We" shows the adventures of Bourne, a queer dilettante, at grips with normal man in abnormal circumstances. The two books complement each other so well. Yours is the first quite

unsentimental war-book—except perhaps for its last page, and nobody could have resisted that kick of farewell. I should have thought less well of you without that touch of irony here and there.

¶ ‘The incidental beauties of the book—the dew-drops on its leaves—are so common as hardly to be seen. That, I feel, is right in a book whose restraint is so strong. You seem to be able to pen a good phrase in simple words almost as and when you please. You beat Bunyan there, for he got to the end of his P.P. without throwing in a deliberately fine phrase. I noted with pleasure . . .’

After a ‘list of delights’ in the prose his letter held, obliquely, a warning. Was this the way he had managed the more difficult Ashrat and Bedu of the Arabian tribes needed for the revolt? (‘Get to know . . . by listening and by indirect enquiry. Do not ask questions. Get to speak their dialect of Arabic, not yours . . . strengthen his prestige at your expense before others if you can . . . never refuse or quash schemes he may put forward . . . after praise modify them insensibly, causing the suggestions to come from him, until they are in accord with your own opinion. When you attain this point, hold him to it, keep a tight grip of his ideas, and push him forward as firmly as possible, but secretly, so that no one but himself (and he not too clearly) is aware of your presence.’)

¶ ‘I begin to suspect that you may be one of those

comparatively rare authors who write best about people or things other than themselves. I hope so, because it is the sort that lasts longest, unless one is a very deep man, like Dostoevsky, and can keep on digging down into oneself. I hope you aren’t that, because it means misery for the artist, and the two roads happiness and misery, seem to be equally within our choice, and it’s more common sense to be happy.

¶ ‘Tarka and this P.P. are better than your novels, I think, because you get further outside the horrific convolutions of your brain in each. The objective, as someone would probably say, which is the classic rather than the romantic manner.

¶ ‘I have enjoyed the P.P. very much. The Hut fellows say it isn’t properly named, it being not a “bloody bind” like that Bunyan chap’s stuff. “Bind” is a lovely word: mental constipation.’

He went on to say that he was content in his work, sleeping well, and continuing with the translation of the *Odyssey*. He hoped to finish it before the end of the year.

¶ ‘I shall run out before that and see you. I swear it. Does not your postcard address still live in my breast pocket? (right breast, alas: a small pencil holds the honour of my heart’s pocket!)’

Later he sent me some of the page proofs of the translation.

¶ ‘These *Odyssey* pages aren’t sent for criticism:

but to show you that no one can help in them. Translations aren't books, for in them is no inevitable word: the whole is approximation, a feeling towards what the author would have said: and as Homer wasn't like me the version goes wrong whenever I let myself into it. . . . The work is not meant to interest you: the Homer who wrote the *Odyssey* was an antiquarian, a tame-cat, a book-worm: not a great poet, but a most charming novelist. A Thornton Wilder of his time. My version, and every version, is inevitably small.

¶ 'Will I ever get to your place again? This Greek eats and drinks all my leisure hours. However I have bought my Dorset cottage out of its profits, as provision for my years when the R.A.F. will not have me any more: so probably it is worth while.

¶ 'I hope W III is a successful and howlingly successful infant.'

That summer, 1930, *The Village Book* was published. I dared to send him a proof copy, asking him not to bother to acknowledge or write about it, but just read in it as he liked for entertainment, the true function of all books. The first leaves began to fall, dry and listless, from the riverside alders. He did not come. Our last tomatoes ripened, the last lettuces lost their freshness. I imagined him with many friends, roaring through thousands of miles every summer month to see them; a free man with enough enforced interesting work to keep

him fit and keen; the R.A.F. station a base from which he might, after duty, go whithersoever he wished. No responsibilities, no property except what he wished for, no grey hairs or thin blood from the biological decadence of a writer's life. He had merited freedom; and had it: a Bedouin of the English highway, with protected oasis in the R.A.F.

For the rest of the war generation, what? We were powerless to make the new world: those whose minds were set before 1914 were still in power. We had no leader, only scattered and unorganized sharpshooters, regarded as *franc tireurs* by the pre-war minded. Hope was overdrawn; credit almost gone. One had lost touch with one's acquaintances; the real friends were all dead, or gone down under the horizon. Life was unbearable in loneliness of the valley. Beautiful were trees and sky and the trout stream; but only for men with clear eyes and minds without memory of dead youth. And, dreaded thought, unless there were mental change—true life or awareness coming to the white-sepulchral minds of 'public opinion', the same war would arise again. I had tried to reveal this in *The Pathway*; and had failed. I wandered by the river, alone; waiting; awaiting—.

On impulse I bought passage to America. Was there hope in the New World? I wrote to 'T. E. Lawrence', saying I was leaving England. As I was packing two mornings later, a reply came.

¶ 'It is even as you say: autumnal weather. I wish I knew what was the matter with me. Some unformed impulse keeps me in camp. I am always putting in passes, and saying "I will go out this week-end": and when the time comes I cannot get into breeches and puttees, so the bike rusts in the garage and I moon about the water's edge in camp, dreaming or dipping inconsequentially into books.

¶ 'It has come to this, that I feel afraid and hesitant outside. The camp itself is like a defence to me, and I can't leave it. I think I have only been outside three times this summer. . . . I am like a clock whose spring has run down.

¶ 'I hope you will not hate the U.S.A. So many people do, whereas it all sounds to me so strong and good. Canada less so, but then I like towns, because only by contrast with cities do trees feel homelike, or seas look happy.

¶ 'Will they send this rot on? Probably not. Have patience with me, when you come back, and sooner or later we will meet and talk, without the bike waiting on the kerb outside.'

Perhaps he, too, needed friendship? Are we not all members one of the other? There is no true life, there is no hope, in the little ego. I thought of the passage in Shakespeare's *Richard II*—the king's farewell—as in calm sunny weather the ship moved up the wide estuary of the St. Lawrence.

The next three weeks were with my friend John

Macrae at the Mastigouche Fish and Game Club in Quebec Province. The lakes and the trees were so silent there; earth and water waiting for the ice to come down from the north; not a bird singing in the grey wastes of old forest fires. René, my French-Canadian guide, was quiet, soft-voiced, tubercular, thinking of the coming winter, which he dreaded. The still brown lake waters were melancholy and the silver-bubble cry of the loons at sunset were of the spirit of vanished men, Indians lost to the sun, even as the friends of boyhood were lost in France, and Palestine, and the quivering scrub hills of Gallipoli. A poor guest, who after the first week showed no desire for *portage* to distant lakes where the 'big one rolled up last year'—but while the others were away fishing, lay about in the log-cabin, lolling in hammock and reading about fishing for brook-trout in mountain lakes of Canada, which had been the dream for some years now . . . but in the mind the everlasting theme recurred, the slow hopelessness of England's youth, Europe's youth, unled, marvellous material wasted because the inspiring force had not yet arisen.

New York; the young, keen writers and critics, pleasantest people in the world, so eager to know, and understand, and share; New York, moon-strange Broadway: sidewalk fatigue of Manhattan, night and day being one, great skiey cliffs of light

and running avenues of fire far down below. New-world fatigue drove out old-world weariness, and the symbol of the gold falcon—which was honour, or the soul, the only true victory of self in frustration and defeat, began to gleam in the mind. If written then, it might have had celestial life, instead of the failure it became. Even so, it was not an exercise in self-pity; but an attempt, very arduous and ineluctable the making of it, to create something out of the vacuum of the post-war period.

The old bad version of *The Dream of Fair Women* was rewritten in three weeks, in an empty eyrie downtown, overlooking Sheridan Square. Let them say what they liked about a book written in three weeks; slashing into it hour after hour, day after day, night after night, one knew what was being done, although one didn't know how it was done. Afterwards, life was empty, an aimless wandering through canyons of light and noise and disintegration until SOS calls brought Loetitia from England, and home again on the dirty *Leviathan*. The Bray ran as before, the kingfisher flashing azure under the bridge where the spring salmon lay and the dipper hung her mossy nest. How was he? Would a short letter be an intrusion, an attempt of a little man seeking out a big man? It was risked.

¶ 'Meanwhile I have read nothing, and written

nothing. The *Odyssey* is unfinished (at Book XXI to be exact) but my technical reports clutter up the pigeon holes of the Air Ministry.

¶ 'In August I must take leave and waste it all in finishing the silly old book off. Curse.

¶ 'Your letter made me pump the tyres of my neglected bike, with a view to seeing you at once. Only then I read the postscript. Next Sunday—I mean Sunday week, the 12th? Do you think that would do?

¶ 'You will see proof that I write in working hours if you look at the bottom of the page before, where the oily wrist of my overalls has soiled the page.

¶ 'It is *immoral* to write in working hours.

¶ 'I wish I could have seen New York, without being seen.

'T. E. S.'

Again the leaves were falling from the alders, whose wavery images shook as trout rose in the quiet pool above Humpy Bridge at dimmit light.

¶ 'I have had my annual leave, all 28 days of it, shut tight in a London room translating the *Odyssey*: and on the last day of it I finished the last book, handed it in to the publisher, and trundled home. Thank heaven it is done. It was on my nerves. Only I have wasted all my leave.'

*The Dream of Fair Women* was a failure in both England and America. I avoided thinking of it; none of my acquaintances had, apparently, been

able to read it. I saw a copy lying in the Rector's house when I called there once. Mrs. Rector immediately hid it under a cushion. A young brewer in the Sailing Club said, during the annual dance, 'I read your book the other day—a damned bad book, if I may say so.' Being also a bit drunk, I replied in like manner, 'I tried to drink a pint of your beer the other day—damned bad beer, if I may say so.' 'I say, I like that,' he said; and I waited, hopeful that at last we had something in common. We toasted each other; and found there was nothing left to say.

Ah, a letter in the well-known hand, Indian ink. My faithful reader, how generous a man was he!

¶ '... a full-blooded book of men and women, very hot, rushing, and life-like. The characters so good; the places so good. Your Rats-Castle, was it?—a creation. Folkestone in Armistice year—the reality itself. Your men so good: all of them. The chief woman feels like a living being . . . You have, in it, come wholly out of your ivory tower. Only in the tower could you have written Tarka: but life is better outside the tower than in.

¶ 'Does the Dream finish the Maddison books? I suppose so. New York will have prompted you to interests so far from your dead self. Only take my assurance that the Dream is very rare and fine and strong.

¶ 'I wonder what you are doing? This sorrowful

weather shuts everyone indoors and will have made your Shallowford too deep to cross, all the summer. I'm afraid of coming to see the place, with a name so lovely. If only you lived at Winston Mudbank, the next valley to ours of the Plym!

¶ 'To tell you the truth, some reluctance holds me constantly in camp. Here I feel in a setting, and amongst likes. Outside—well, I am hasty to move elsewhere, always, and impatient with the company. Camp is restful, and uniform an assurance of something or other.'

Again the impulse, Go and see him! Again the doubt, You may be obtruding. And as for this other book that somehow has gotten itself written, shall I send that? It was dull stuff, local village details, small beer indeed. No, I would not send it. Then there was half a book, written in New York during the intervals of the long lonely hours of walking about the streets of Manhattan. I had written half of it, then on return to England, had foolishly sent that half to Jonathan Cape. Half a book, it was like sending a half-cooked dinner. So I had exposed myself to the inevitable rebuff. The pages had been sent to Edward Garnett, who had advised the abandonment of the purely objective *tour de force* for the sake of both author and author's wife. The falcon had become a harrier, tearing at the mind with its concealed theme of God pursuing and ultimately claiming the pilgrim soul. For under a

bitter scorn of organized religion many so-called moderns could not help themselves believing in deity, and its manifestations in rare men and women. The original dedication of *The Pathway* bore this 'dedication on two planes', which later prudence, and experience of literary critics, caused to be struck out in proof. 1. *To the Son, and the Mother, in the hope that the pathway to the Light lies in the sun.* 2. *To Zoroaster, Jesus, Paul, Shelley, Blake, Hardy, Jefferies, Lenin, Shaw (T. E. and G. B.) and many others.*

Weeks, months, of semi-emptiness, of sameness, in the shut-in valley life: feeding half-tame trout in the pool below Humpy Bridge in the deer park, and travelling at speed in an open car. Otherwise the seasons passed in silence, and again it was September. Our moods seemed to be in parallel; one below Dartmoor, the other below Exmoor.

¶ 'Another year gone, and us still wide apart despite one perfectly good Silver Eagle and one perfectly good Brough.

¶ 'I spend my days and nights working on motor boats, still, and chase all round the English coast after them or in them. Web-footed now, and quack before mealtimes.

¶ 'I have not written to anyone till tonight for months. Now I have written sixteen letters. That is not correspondence but massacre, and I am ashamed.'

That autumn, the pen forcing one word after another, *The Gold Falcon* was finished. Five months later, February 1933, it was published anonymously. A copy was specially bound and dedicated 'to "T. E. Lawrence"', by whose taken thought the author added a cubit to his stature'; and sent to him from London, without explanation. He guessed the authorship.

¶ 'I've been grinning through the week-end over the Falcon, of which a vellum and gold copy reached me from Faber on Saturday.

¶ 'By the same post arrived a plain copy, sent me from an indignant reviewer, demanding to know why I had fathered this decadent bilge upon an innocent world. It's a queer world, my mistresses!

¶ 'The Falcon has that jumpy, nervous, stippled technique that you were developing in the *Dream of Women*. It fits a jazzy subject, and conveys an astonishing sense of movement, all through the tale.

¶ 'I thought old Homer duplicated too often. Tricks in books feel sharper than in real life. There are several astonishing bits of characterisation. The climax was perhaps your only way out of a difficulty . . . but about it I'd repeat my "tricks" remarks. All right in life, but too coloured for a tale.

¶ 'Wrink I didn't recognize: but all your contemporaries (except Priestley, perhaps) will recognize themselves preeningly. I preened. Are my letters real extracts, or have you polished?'

¶ 'To write the day after is not wise. I can't say how I really regard the book. You are a long way from the chiselled and rather static prose of your beginning: and it is always good to go on, and bad to repeat. Only I sometimes wonder where you are going.

¶ 'They'll all call Manfred a self-portrait: but somehow I remember you as much more solid than that. I wish I could get over to you and see. Will they leave me in Plymouth this summer, or will it be Hythe, again?

The 'indignant reviewer' revealed himself in a literary weekly, a few days after 'T. E. Lawrence's' death, to be a Mr. John Brophy. Apparently he made some suggestion to T. E., possibly advising protest to the publishers of *The Gold Falcon*, which he 'disliked intensely'. In his own words, 'It was published anonymously, but I was so sure the author was Mr. Henry Williamson that I invited him, in my review, to take an action for libel if I had guessed wrong. I sent a copy of the book to 'T. E.', because one of the characters was, to my mind, clearly intended as a portrait of him.' To the reviewer T. E. Shaw replied:

¶ 'This disintegrated, exclamatory style fits its subject. As for his contemporaries . . . Williamson praises all the others, including me. Admittedly, he has quoted letters of mine, but such harmless plain phrases. No room for objection, from me! I crop

up, sporadically, in the books of today: always briefly and seldom gratifyingly. Highest marks yet reached—Lady Chatterley's Lover and a preface by Yeats to Gogarty's poems.'

The 'indignant reviewer' further reveals himself, 'I was never able to draw "T. E." on Mr. Bernard Shaw's private soldier in *Too True to be Good*.' And further, 'I may as well confess that . . . the central character in my novel *Flesh and Blood* was conceived out of my strivings to understand "T. E." I never claimed to understand him, though this ceased to distress me when I came to the conclusion that he did not understand himself.'

This plaintively opaque critic was one of the detractors of the genius of D. H. Lawrence, about whom he wrote witheringly after that great poet's death.

And while that other man of genius is in the mind, one wonders how 'T. E. Lawrence' would have fared had he, in infancy, been exchanged with the infant D. H. Lawrence? Would he have grown up an 'escapist', frustrated man of action, ineffectual angel, all his life streaming away in beautiful prose of resurrection? And would the mature life of D. H. Lawrence, reared by a gentle Irishman and strong-minded Scots foster-mother, have been a struggle to escape from the terrors and anguishments of childhood, and to create through art a world of normal, happy, human beings? Surely



not: D. H. L. in such circumstances of unconventional freedom would have been as intelligent, otherwise perceptive, as he was, but happier; while T. E. L., reared in pithead poverty by parents mal-adjusted sexually, would have been a frustrated man of action, a writer of genius, but irrevocably a 'rebel'. Probably he would have married, to complete himself; and found inevitable unhappiness in his marriage. When an attempt was made to discuss this theme and illustration with John Galsworthy in 1930 he replied, in a very quiet voice of exhaustion, 'I don't think there is any profit in the discussion of any literary might-have-beens.' This reply may have been due to Galsworthy's weariness, to his dissympathy with my sort of mind, and also to D. H. Lawrence's criticism of his work in a near scurrilous essay in a book called *Scrutinies*, wherein a collection of young writers, most of them no good, attacked established elderly authors.

¶ '11 March 1933.

¶ 'Your letters make me laugh, and then think hard. You are really two entirely different people, and if only they could come together what a book we should have!

¶ 'I didn't answer because you said you were coming, and now I am sorry you may not. I am away from Thursday to Monday of next week, but constantly in the station for the rest.

¶ 'My R.A.F. life is very near its end: not to let it

gutter away I am leaving voluntarily next month. For what? Heaven knows.'

Then in April it was necessary to walk along the South Devon coast from the Dorset border to Plymouth, seeking material for a guide book which in a weak moment had been promised to a friend who was acquainted with a new publisher whose ambition it was to guide everyone to everywhere in England. (The guide book developed into farce and parody of conventional guide books.) On Friday evening, after a week of lone walking, I crossed in the ferry from the quay to the R.A.F. Cattewater, and on enquiry was given a letter.

¶ 'Your letter came this morning, and there was no way by which I could catch you. So we miss each other. I have just left for Brimmerston, near Tidworth, to meet a mere Brigadier; I would have put him off, but it's a second appointment, a "duty crew" having short-circuited my last trip to him. I am so sorry.

¶ 'Return p.m. Sunday, about 7.30 I expect: and here till Thursday afternoon.

¶ 'My R.A.F. time grows very short, and I have so much to do.'

A fortnight later, May 1933.

¶ 'Still Plymouth!

¶ 'Valedictory note in your last letter premature, I hope: the R.A.F. still keep me on stretch, perpend-ing to discharge me, but hesitating: as soon as they know their minds, I shall be at peace again: and

this summer I descend on Filleigh: somehow and sometime.

¶ 'I hope the guide went easily. Devon has lovely bits, but the Exmoor side is ten thousand times better than the S.

¶ 'I had a noble ride: Salisbury in 2 hours 56 mins: a splendid bike, this one of mine. I *slide* past Alvises. . . .'

The year darkened, and just before Christmas he wrote again.

¶ 'I have a feeling you are not in England, despite those regular notes in the Sunday Referee. Good notes, too . . .

¶ 'My life is still boats and more boats. I am faint but persevering. Fourteen more months and my R.A.F. status ceases: alas. It is outworn already, but will nevertheless be regretted.

¶ 'Lately I have re-read Tarka—and find the old mastery that shocked and startled me in India. It is a fine book. You could make Bradshaw interesting, if you edited it.

¶ 'I hope my feeling that you are unhappy is not true. Perhaps you have given away too much of yourself not to feel poor: and in that connexion, yet another "life" of me is to appear next year. Only these lives by third parties are external things. They do not break the skin.

¶ 'Let us meet, when we are both free men, eventually!'

In the early spring of 1934 an unexpected invitation to visit Georgia came, and an immediate decision to leave England. During the past year there had been one good thing in the valley life—chapter by chapter a novel about a group of pilots in the old Royal Flying Corps had been arriving from a friend of faraway schooldays who was very ill with tuberculosis. The book was exciting, a true re-creation of the past. By the sharpness of its focusing, and bite of its prose, the author had genius. I visited him in London once or twice; he was very poor; and I knew that by the success or failure of his book would he live or die. He was without the proper air, food, quiet, and security that were necessary for him to build up his strength to fight the disease.

T. E. was stationed at Southampton. I wrote and asked if he would be near the *Berengaria* at sailing time; I wanted to ask him the only favour I would ever ask him: to help into success the forthcoming book, *Winged Victory*, by V. M. Yeates, which Jonathan Cape had accepted, unread, on my recommendation.

¶ 'A line scribbled in haste—my only letter to anyone for a long time. I am all boats-and-engines, engrossed.

¶ 'Yes, your unhappy letter was very unhappy. I wondered if I could do anything, and knew that I couldn't. In the end we are all self-contained.

¶ 'I will try and see you on Wednesday, for a moment, if the job will ease up for a little and let me cross the water. In case I don't see you—fare you well, and come back sometime, when you feel you can. I'm not the only one who draws pleasure to himself from your work.

¶ 'I'll sound Cape about the Air book, but will not promise to say anything aloud about it. I've done so three or four times, and learned to grow sick, each time, over what I've said. It's no good yawping unintelligently for joy; and impossible when joyful to cerebrate wisely!'

The *Berengaria* was to sail at noon on the last day of February, 1934. After missing each other in my cabin, we both went to the gangway as the key-position on the boat.

He was standing, hands behind back, patiently, against a bulkhead. He wore overalls, splashed with wet. His face was brick-red, his eyes cornflower blue. He looked like an elder, more serious brother of the man I'd talked to in Ham five years before. Again I had the illusion, formulated afterwards, that he was as tall as myself, or rather, of the non-difference in our sizes. I wondered why no one had remarked the likeness of his face and head to Wagner's. His eyes were an intensely deep, straight blue. Those eyes saw without illusion. Something had gone from him; a spring uncoiled. Only deep sadness could have done that.

He glanced at me, then away, then back again, before staring direct and saying in a voice soft with slight Irish brogue, 'Is it you? You've changed. You're not so tall.' I thought his voice was changed; it had Bernard Shaw's brogue, but clearer, less Irish. I felt myself changing as we talked, felt myself growing taller, the hollows in my face and the tautness on my cheekbones and temples vanishing.

Other changes were apparent in him, too. He was now without shyness. His gaze was calm and direct, yet impersonal like the gaze of all well-mannered people. A paradox occurred to me: he, so much the spirit of good machinery, was an aromatic oil for our machine age neurosis. And yet no paradox, because he was the truly modern man, who used machinery for enjoyment of life, while loving it.

It was so clear at this meeting how he affirmed sensitive people to themselves; he absorbed one's shell or covering, and supplied the small inner personal light with oxygen, so that from a flickering glimmer it becomes for oneself a clear, bright flame. He took one's light from under the bushel measure of 'public opinion'. Was not this the dream of Jesus, who struggled to reveal to the men of his age how their prejudices prevented them from seeing the possibilities of a truly civilized world of men; and did not the rulers of the world he knew, and saw through, consider the Nazarene

to be a dangerous nuisance, even a criminal, and after many attempts to obtain evidence by clumsy devices of tribute money, etc., succeed in getting him convicted on the capital offence of blasphemy? The ideology arising later from out that cruel death, systemized by revering minds, was not human, otherwise spiritually, true; hence boring sermons in church. Like Jesus, T. E. Lawrence had completely realized himself, he had learned the enormous value of being his true, or simple self. So his friends felt not only safe with him, but integrated. T. E. Lawrence was now an amalgam—quicksilver of youth blended with gold of realized experience.

He had thrown off the labels and theories of perplexities of his friends and acquaintances about himself, men lesser in penetration and speed of sight. He had ceased to be 'a wild beast, will not breed in captivity' which Winston Churchill, that brilliant exponent of 'public opinion', had insisted he must be. Through sympathy and accommodation to the public opinionativeness of lesser men, T. E. Lawrence had assumed a refracting and reflecting mask of multi-strangeness. Like a small child who is told it is not very strong, he had repeated, even believed, what he had been told about himself. There is no man so helpless as a poet when his power is not upon him. Life flows through the poet; in most people it is checked, or made static,

even stagnant, in childhood or youth. Life becomes mere 'public opinion'. But T. E. Lawrence was fundamentally incorruptible; and in the end he had dispossessed himself of their opinions or warped images, and entered the strong stream of normal life. To speculating friends he still could say, obliquely, 'I am supposed to be a chameleon.' 'On the contrary, you are a nice green grasshopper—on wheels.' He laughed. He was normal. And yet underneath, I felt he was not happy. Nor yet, unhappy. He was—homeless. 'When you come back from America', he said, 'you must come to my cottage and I'll come and live in your hill-top hut with you, and we'll swim, and walk, and pick nuts off the hedges, and lie on our backs in the sand-hills and do nothing, and think of nothing. It's no good thinking any more. One must do things with one's hands.' He half showed his hands an instant. 'Thought is only good when it precedes action. Thought without action is frustration.'

While talking with him, a young man with an aloof yet courteous expression on his pale face was moving slowly through the crowd towards us; and seeming, as he came nearer, to be his own ghost. This was a friend whom I saw about twice a year—another wanderer, pilgrim of thought. He also was a writer—he wrote a novel about his schooling of which some deplorable things were said and written by critics—by deplorable is meant attitudes

of contempt, implied self-righteousness, scorn, and inaccuracy, the usual mental attitudes that cause periodical wars between nations, since nations are composed of individuals. This friend was one of the most gracious and understanding of men, an amusing writer with an accurate sense of character and scene, and above all, a light touch.

He walked slowly towards us, his old battered Bavarian hat stuck jauntily on the back of his head, his chin unshaven, his face very thin. He had come in his small open car, in which he roamed alone over Europe, a sort of motor tramp, to see me off to America; and only six days before he had had an operation for the removal of part of the intestines: physical ill-health due to spiritual worry. He was still weak, but said nothing about it; I didn't then know that he had been operated on. It was pleasing to realize that he and Shaw got on well immediately. 'I remember your book. I read it. It was a good book.' Then, with reference to something said about Hugh Walpole's criticism of James Hanley's book *Boy*, 'Hugh Walpole—what does he know about life? He lives in a library.' Liddell Hart's book on 'T. E. Lawrence' had just been published. 'He makes it all fit in: afterwards: it didn't happen like that: but who will believe it now?'

I had brought half a bottle of champagne for John Heygate, and one of tomato juice cocktail for

T. E.; but there was no time to drink them. T. E. said, when I mentioned the wine, 'Thanks, but I daren't drink anything. One sip, and I go all dithery, and utter the most awful rot.'

The difference between these two men was a difference in grade. Both had had 'a hell of a time'. Both had learned to realize themselves in relation to other men; they were entirely conscious of themselves; but the younger man, who was thirty, had not yet affirmed himself. His childhood and boyhood, like many another of his generation, were deficient in parental understanding or sympathy. He was just too young for the World War in which 'T. E. Lawrence' became one of the legendary romantic figures. The sensitives of his generation were the Lost Generation. They had all the reaction of the Great War without any of the action; they had only the mental repercussions. They went 'wild' because their parents were hopelessly pre-war in the post-war age.

While we were talking, someone came diffidently to Lawrence and said, 'Excuse me, I'm Cunard Publicity, may we take a photograph, please. Of course I understand if you'd rather we didn't. . . .'

'It would get me into trouble,' replied T. E. Shaw, indicating his R.A.F. uniform, while Heygate and I started to talk to each other about each other. 'They don't like individual publicity. I am sorry, but I must say no.'

'Of course, sir, I understand,' and the young man raised his hat and rejoined two of his friends who stood by a tripod with camera and sound apparatus among the passengers saying good-bye to their friends. Eyes were now turned upon T. E. Lawrence.

He seemed to be fading. He was fading. He was dulled out.

'Good-bye, we'll all meet at the cottage, don't forget,' he murmured, shook hands limply with me, and dissolved. His 'Shelley's trick of vanishing suddenly' was, I saw, a feeling induced in his companions by the sudden withdrawal of transmuted solar force. Things seemed to shrink—conversation, imagination, hope—after he had gone. Heygate said:

'I notice how deliberately he voids himself, for the service of others, while remaining entirely himself. He has no eddies or backwaters of life or thought about him—a streamlined mentality.'

Soon the *Berengaria* was moving down the Solent and into the open sea. I remained away until May 1934, spending most of the time in Georgia and Florida writing the autobiography, *Sun in the Sands*, hoping thereby to slough the past and begin again. While there Yeates was revising the proofs of *Winged Victory*, a re-creation of life in a Camel squadron at Izel-le-Hameau. He wrote letters which were so sharply similar to those of T. E.

Lawrence that I sent some on to T. E., with a bag of pecan nuts from Augusta.

¶ 'I have spent the evenings of rather more than a week in delightedly reading *Winged Victory*, the Yeates book. It is admirable: admirable: admirable.

¶ '... Special pleasures. The feeling of flight, when they play among the clouds, and spin the earth about their props. The Archie play. The character-drawing, of Tom and of the other familiar and developed pilots. The bigger his development the better his drawing . . . I take it that much of the book is reality, including the hospital chapters. Some of the men-in-the-distance I recognise, faintly.

¶ 'A regret to me—the absence of the other ranks: but of course an officer never sees them.

¶ 'How fortunate the R.A.F. has been to collar for itself one of the most distinguished histories of the war! And how creditable that it deserves it.'

¶ 'I'm afraid the book is too late for its public, and that it may not be sufficiently sold to reward Yeates for his merit in writing it.

¶ 'Admirable, wholly admirable. An imperishable pleasure. . . .'

All the time in Georgia and Florida my thoughts were of England; seeing the South as in a dream, writing all day in nigger pants and sun-glasses, trying to dissolve away in thought the world of the past. In June, after my return to Devon, I wrote to

T. E. asking him to come any time he wished, without notice.

¶ . . . a splendid surprise. I had somehow imagined you settled in America for months. The letter, the cotton bale, the excellent nuts (I eat one per week, ritually, as I visit my cottage where they are stored) had all confirmed me in that feeling of your being gone.

¶ 'I dislike people going very far away. They seem to lose their actuality, their roots. I fancy that contact with plain men, one's equals, is a necessity for mental health. They "place" us.

¶ 'I should like to come to your valley-country: but . . . in any hours that I can snatch between the boats I must visit my cottage, for that half-ruin and wholly unfinished place must be cleaned up enough, by this winter, to act "home" to me in the spring. March next, exit of T. E. S. from the Air Force: very sad, I think, this freedom will be at first: but then it should be a safe feeling, to have the house to live in, without rule (I have never had any sort of house of my own before) and there are so many things I have not yet done, that I can hardly be lonely or bored.

¶ 'I'm not, I think, a lonely person: though often and generally alone. There is a distinction. I like your hypothesis to explain my character, by the way. It has experience behind it, I fancy. For myself, I do not know. I measure myself against the

fellows I meet and work with, and find myself ordinary company, but bright and sensible. Almost I would say popular!

¶ 'We shall find ourselves together soon!'

Here I hesitate to quote further from his letters, because all the while I have been writing here, in my hill-top hut overlooking the Atlantic, in this sunny weather of July 1936, I have felt there has been, under my sadness, a feeling that the reader might think the writer is trying to assert his own importance, trying to publicize himself, and to boost books that, in all probability, the reader has never heard of.

On the radio as I write Toscanini is conducting a Brahms symphony from London, music which quickens immortal longings beyond Egypt; and in the feeling of the music grows a curious awareness of two men of genius I have known and are now dead: one a small brother of the greater—they will live in men's minds by *Winged Victory* and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

So regard Williamson in this chapter of autobiography as just one of Lawrence's many hundreds of acquaintances and friends, most of whom were, and are, unaware of one another knowing "T. E."—the man who possessed, developed, and used the highest genius of all—the genius of friendship. The genius of friendship is the controlled use of self for the good of others. Jesus of

Nazareth radiated that human force: the plain people have remembered him for nearly two thousand years, not quite knowing why, not quite believing 'the yarns they tell'. . . .

December 11th., 1934.

¶ 'I have so much the better of you: for when I want a talk, it is just putting out an arm and taking a book from my shelves. That's as it should be, at least; but just now I live in this house with a jesting name (here to watch the refit of ten R.A.F. boats for next season's work on the bombing range) and for a word with you yesterday I had to go to York and lay out three days' pay on The Linhay . . . which I have been dipping into, with satisfaction, all this too-rough Sunday. Too rough for a walk from lodgings. No clothes, poor fire for drying.

¶ 'What a sentence for No. I! Do you find it hard to begin books? Let me take down your hackles by two quotes from the Linhay: bad sentences P. 67 "how heat and the floating algae . . . takes" . . . P. 36 "many old bucks are caught in gins which otherwise would eat young rabbits".

¶ 'It isn't fair, for I would like to write like you, easily or grudgingly but copiously, able to make a sentence of all you see and do, with a catching intimate easy speech, like a man in slippers. For a mannered writer, you have the best manners in the world.

¶ 'Don't vex yourself over Walpole or Shanks or

Hanks or Banks: or vex yourself only because they discourage your book-buyers. Or do they? The best way to sell a novel was to persuade the Bishop of London to preach against it. I can conceive Hugh Walpole being second-best. I fancy writers get so wrapped up in their own sort of writing, that they find all variations from it bad. At least, they seem to me to make poor critics of contemporary stuff. You write almost disarmingly well. You write better than Richard Jefferies, splendid fellow though he was: better for me, that is: I feel more heart and see less eye, in you. You look for the unusual, he for the average. Of course he had an awful life. No Alvis, no country contentment, or comfort, anyhow. Few concerns aside from earning, and no war to light his background. We learned a lot in those years, which makes us immemorially older and wiser than the old or the young.

¶ 'Stop burbling? All right, I'll stop. Let's get back to history. I am discharged from the R.A.F. (my life, almost) next March: and cannot make even the ghost of plans for afterwards. There is my cottage in Dorsetshire (Clouds Hill, Moreton, Dorset) on the heath just north of Bovington Camp, between Dorchester and Wareham. I'll have to go there, for my savings have not been very successful; I'll have only 25/- a week. So I must sit under my own roof, and do nothing till I want to do something. Is that a programme?



¶ 'I hope an Alvis may visit me, for if you ever go to England (*sic*) via S. Dorset is not much further than via the Plain. In my cottage is no food, and no bed. At nightfall there is a flea-bag, and I lay it on the preferred patch of floor in either room. The ground-room is for books, and the stair-room is for music: music being the trade-name for a gramophone and records. There are five acres of rhododendrons and fires every evening from their sticks. It sounds to me all right for living, but then so does your valley—yet you often throw yourself angrily away from it. Well, we shall see. But bring your own food. I shall have no cooking. It smells in so small a house. A tiny house. No water near, alas!

¶ 'As I said, at the beginning, I have the advantage of you, for when I want a word with Henry Williamson, it is only the stretching of an arm to a shelf. If I want him objective, there's Tarka; subjective, there's the Pathway or Falcon or Dream of Women. I feel greedy, at having so much of so many people (though not the half I should have had. Books have gone from my hands wholesale while my back was turned. My cottage holds only the rags of a collection) and at liking them so much without making a return. (By the way, did I ever lend you the typescript of my R.A.F. book? Surely I did, poor return though it is.) Sometimes I sit on my chair amidst the books, afraid to open any of them, not having earned it. If only I could write like I read.

¶ 'Stop burbling again? All right, but this sea rushing and sliding in my ears won't stop. My room is a tower-room, over the harbour wall, and the waves roll all day like green swiss rolls over the yellow sand, till they hit the wall and run back like spinning rope. I want to walk out in the wind and the wet, like at Clouds Hill, and can't, for my landlady's sake.

¶ 'Keep cheerful. And let us meet after my R.A.F. life is ended.

'Yours,

'T. E. S.'

A few days later V. M. Yeates ('Wingless Victor', as he signed his letters) died. I had promised to go and see him, two hundred miles away, and always something seemed to prevent it—something of my formless self, for I was entirely free to come and go as I pleased. At last I set out in the Silver Eagle to the Fairlight public hospital near Hastings in Sussex; and when I arrived the matron said, 'Are you the friend Mr. Yeates was always hoping to see? I am sorry, but you are too late; he died this morning.'

I wrote to my other friend, the faithful T. E.

¶ 'In a racing hurry:—the death of Yeates strikes me as a direct loss to myself: queer, for I'd never met him. Thank heaven you got him delivered of that book, while he could. It would have been tragic for him, if he had died and the tale not re-

corded. I hope some of the book-papers will see what has been lost. I recommend his book to everybody likely, as I meet them, and find a general agreement that it is unsurpassed, of its kind. Does he leave dependents, in difficulty? I hope not, for there is no money in Winged Victory. Too good, by half.'

Yeates had died before he need have died; he lived in a foggy part of London, and hoped vainly for success, which would mean money to go away and rest and be content in mind, assured that his wife and children were provided for. I wrote an elegy for him, very much as I am doing now for Lawrence of Arabia, only the article on Wingless Victor was tragic, because circumstances were too much for him, although he never lost heart, he never gave way to sadness.

¶ 'Thank you [wrote T. E.] for . . . your article upon Yeates. I suppose it was too late: but one reads it with a sense of shame. He ought not to have been let die. The book would have helped him in time, for I'm sure it will go to some thousands in the end. The big seller makes its bang and drops dead: the slowly growing sale lasts for years and brings in as much, eventually. I cannot see Winged Victory dying short.

¶ 'How about his wife and children? They are more than half the tragedy. Is there any prospect of help for them?

¶ 'You must do something about Yeates (this

article or a recast of it) in your next volume of miscellanies. The picture you draw of him is very good, and his own letters help out your sense. The poor chap. I wish we had been able to do something. It was good of you to offer him the means to go south, for you haven't anything to spare. In such cases I fancy the south is only a last illusion, so perhaps he was right to say no.

¶ 'I cannot think of anything useful at the moment. It was (it is) so good a book.

'Yours

'T. E. S.

¶ 'One month to go! Only a month. I can feel it happening now.'

The world knows the end of the story. But let me hold my thread of the tapestry of human friendship for a little while longer. T. E. Shaw was discharged finally from the R.A.F., and went to live at his cottage on Egdon Heath. At once he set to work with his hands, completing a glass-covered swimming bath among the rhododendrons, and beginning the building of a small bungalow near it for the use of a friend, a local man who helped with the gardening and work about the house: Crusoe and man Friday. Was he happy? No man, working with hands, is unhappy. Not for him the worried brow of responsibility, the hollowness of political position, the wrinkled foreheads of the white faces of Whitehall. In the peak of his power

he had measured himself against the world's leaders at Versailles; and seen nothing there, except selfishness, finesse, and frustration. Literary ambition? He had learned, swiftly as he learned all else, that the mortifications of authorship were equal to the aspiration of creation; and only the mortifications endured. As for fame, it was embarrassment, people saying unnatural things to him, people staring, people being pretentious, people being bad-mannered, people being inquisitive, people treating him as something different, people's attitudes distorting him from his true self. He wanted to be left alone, to get on with his own life, to have his own friends, to use brain and body equally in balance; he had built his house of self on the rock of simplicity, not on the sand of personal ambition. He wanted to live as a boy wants to live. Wise man: rock-like sagacity, which word is interchangeable with the abused word humanity. How the family man, with a hundred domestic details to distract and irritate him every day, dependent on an unnatural practice of sitting still several hours out of the sun, forcing his vitality into his brain and striving to imagine things, to be turned into words, words, words: for money—how he envied the freedom of T. E. Shaw!

So one May morning he flung down his pen and went to the garage, and looked at the long low length of the Alvis car, six cylinders and three car-

burettors, twenty-three miles to the gallon and eighty miles an hour, six years old, nearly a hundred thousand miles of life, and running sweet as the west wind. Better first to send a letter: or simply to turn up: which? He wrote a letter. Now this was quite an occasion, he thought—perhaps the beginning of a friendship that . . . for it was time something was done about the pacification of Europe through friendship and fearless common sense. The spirit of resurgent Europe must not be allowed to wither, to change to a thwarted rage of power. With Lawrence of Arabia's name to gather a meeting of ex-Service men in the Albert Hall, with his presence and stimulation to cohere into unassailable logic the authentic mind of the war generation come to power of truth and amity, a whirlwind campaign which would end the old fearful thought of Europe (usury-based) for ever. So that the sun should shine on free men!

He must go at once to Egdon Heath and tell the only man in England who could bring it about. So he wrote a letter saying he would arrive, 'unless rainy day'.

The answer came by telegram.

☐ 11.25 a.m. 15 May 1935

'Williamson Shallowford Filleigh

'Launch Tuesday wet fine cottage 1 mile north  
Bovington Camp

'SHAW'

Returning on his motor-cycle from the Camp post office, whither he had gone specially to send that telegram, 'T. E. Lawrence' crashed and broke his head, and knew nothing more, save of strange suns beyond Arabia, beyond the human shores of the world.

While he lay unconscious in the small military hospital of corrugated iron at Bovington Camp—the body with bound head was being turned over and tilted every hour in the hope of running off saliva and phlegm which was congesting one lung—many newspaper men waited there. At first all information, although there wasn't much to give, was withheld from the press: causing, ironically, the opposite of what his friends and relations desired—an intense interest in T. E. Shaw's condition, in his cottage, in his recent life. Had he recovered and become normal once more, an ordinary unmolested life at his home would have been impossible. Everyone in England knew of that cottage. Once started, the news-value of the accident increased like a snowball rolled down a white slope. The more popular, wealthier newspapers began to compete for sensational material. The popular London daily which had always been first to pursue him, came out with a front-page story of 'Strange Tales'—'wild speculations'—'Lawrence not in hospital at all'—'a trick while he slips out of

England on a secret service mission'—'mysterious heath fires near his woodland cottage, set ablaze by sinister agents of foreign chancelleries' to destroy his 'secret books and papers'—'Britain in peril if Lawrence dies, for in his brain alone are stored our war plans'. The smart daily, after enumerating these 'local rumours', then declared itself 'able to give a categorical denial to them'. That was not difficult, since they had been raised up in order to fall flat only in its flamboyant columns.

Some of the war friends of Lawrence of Arabia—for that name is now history—foregathered in vigil on the dark brown heath of pine and gravel and rhododendron, and on the Saturday of their hero's crisis the newcomer saw, with a slight shock, faces known before only in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, but tempered by the years' thought and quietness, men who looked back through the desert of Time to that which always shone brighter in lengthening memory. After greeting, it seemed fit that the newcomer, from another world, should travel on. 'He will recover,' they said. 'Yes, he will recover.' It seemed that he could not die; other men died, but not Lawrence of Arabia. But in the night the pulse suddenly lost itself, and recovered in alarm, irregularly. Oxygen and injections of adrenalin were given the body; the mind was already gone. In the morning the pulse had sunk to a trickle, 'scarcely notating the passing of time', and

they knew his hour was upon him. That was a moment of deepest shock: the strong, proud star falling from its orbit. Now his spirit was fighting for its final freedom. 'In the end we are all self-contained.' A few minutes after eight o'clock, on the 19th May, 1935, there was a check in the struggle, the least fluttering sigh. So he died; and is immortal with the shining of the sun upon 'plain men, his equals'.

*Shallonford, 1936*

